RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

September 2004

Socio-economic Series 04-029

COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY PLANNING: EXPERIENCES IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

INTRODUCTION

This is a time of rapid change for many Aboriginal communities. Changes are occurring for various reasons such as growing populations, increasing possibilities to realize self-governance, and more opportunities for economic development including resource development in the north. Communities that face these pressures are striving to respond in a way that is in harmony with their traditions, wanting their development to be sustainable. They need a plan to move forward but they want to know more about how to go about it and they are particularly interested in learning what other communities, in similar circumstances, have done.

Aboriginal communities are located all across Canada. While a few are as large as a small town, most are small, numbering fewer than 500 inhabitants. The large majority are very limited in economic resources and skills are in short supply. Likely because of this, the planning that has taken place has been done on an as needed basis, usually for a specific purpose. Community planning, in contrast, is broader and is long term. It is a comprehensive plan and contains the community's vision of where it wants to go.

To assist in developing comprehensive plans, a study was undertaken to document the planning experiences of a number of communities. This Research Highlight provides an overview of the study and its findings. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), Public Works Government Services Canada (PWGSC), and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) provided support for the project.

METHODOLOGY

The research for the publication was performed under the guidance and direction of the First Nations and Inuit Comprehensive Community Planning working group (FNICCP). Membership comprised representatives from a selection of Aboriginal communities, INAC headquarters and regions, PWGSC and CMHC.

The working group decided on a case study approach. Based on their knowledge and resources, they developed a list of generic circumstances (for example, community relocation or land base expansion) under which communities would need to plan. For each circumstance, a list of communities that had been through a planning process was prepared. First Nations communities (13) associated with the Atlantic Canada Joint Community Planning Committee and another 17 First Nations, Inuit and Northern communities across Canada were selected from the list and were approached for permission to share their stories.

Neegan Burnside, a consulting firm, was hired to profile the planning experiences of the communities. Profiles were compiled from site visits, telephone interviews and in a couple of instances using existing documentation.

FINDINGS

The communities have different backgrounds, circumstances and priorities. This results in a rich diversity of planning experiences from which much can be learned. The community planning process has many dimensions and fits into many other important community functions. It is the central tool used to change community vision into reality.

The stories focus on some of the most current and relevant challenges and opportunities facing First Nations, Inuit and Northern communities today. The following provides an overview, by planning circumstance, of the communities presented in the publication.

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Community Relocations and Land Base Expansions

First Nations relocate and expand their land base for many reasons under a variety of circumstances. Although the four communities highlighted are each unique, they share many common challenges and planning approaches to meet these challenges.

In the case of Oujé-Bougoumou in Quebec, the First Nation planned and created a new community at a new site from scratch. Anicinape de Kitcisakik, also in Quebec, started their planning processes to determine the feasibility of such a move.

The Muskeg Lake Cree Nation (MLCN) in Saskatchewan expanded their land base through the Land Treaty Entitlement Process. MLCN acquired land in Saskatoon and developed it for residential, commercial and industrial purposes. Mount Currie First Nation in British Columbia created a new settlement area within their reserve to respond to the need for more housing in a safer location.

Key success factors are noted below.

Community	Key success factors
Anicinape de Kitcisakik	• Living by core values and principles • Present sacrifice for future benefit • Long-term and broad planning perspective • Learning from others' experiences • Community commitment to move plan forward
Mount Currie First Nation	• Planning driven by housing needs • Skills development • Community consultation and commitment
Muskeg Lake Cree Nation	• Strong relationship building with involvement of the business community • Building on early success • Flexible planning to match other jurisdictions
Oujé-Bougoumou Cree Nation	• Visionary leadership • Determination • Effective use of outside resources • Blending tradition and innovation • Financial management

Traditional dwelling under construction in the cultural village beside the new community of Oujé-Bougoumou.

Northern Communities

Northern Aboriginal communities share several features that affect how they take on and carry out community planning. Most Northern communities are remote, a factor that limits access, services and resources. Winter climates can be harsh and the local terrain can pose problems. These factors significantly affect the planning of community infrastructure, buildings and energy systems.

Northern communities generally operate under the various statutes of the Northwest Territories (NWT), Yukon and Nunavut, whereas Indian reserves operate under federal statutes. The strong influence of natural resources and how they are managed, both environmentally and for economic development, also affect planning in the North.

The Hay River Dene Reserve was created in the early 1970s and is the home of the K'atlodeeche First Nation. In developing their community plan, the First Nation worked on striking a balance between development and preservation. This is the only reserve in the NWT.

In the case of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, with two communities (N'Dilo and Dettah), plans were prepared in a poster format that showed a map of the community including land use, restrictions under designated areas and facility sites.

Coral Harbour, an Inuit hamlet on Southampton Island, created a community plan and bylaws to guide its economic and social development.

The key success factors are noted below.

Community	Key success factors
Hay River Dene Reserve (K'atlodeeche First Nation)	• Planning driven by environmental protection and improved community safety • Combined traditional approaches with modern municipal land use and control. • Community members give direction to planning and consultant • Strong relationship with neighbouring municipality
N'Dilo and Dettah (Yellowknives Dene communities)	• Simple yet comprehensive approach • Poster-board format • Partnership with neighbouring municipality
Hamlet of Coral Harbour	• Capitalizing on local opportunity for sustainable economic development • Setting achievable goals as a starting point • Effective resource management

Dettah poster plan

Northern view of Coral Harbour

Rural and Urban Communities

Rural First Nation communities usually have a small population and low-density development. Urban First Nations can be either an urban community by themselves or integrated with a surrounding urban environment.

Rolling River First Nation is a rural community in southern Manitoba that focused community-planning initiatives on economic development opportunities.

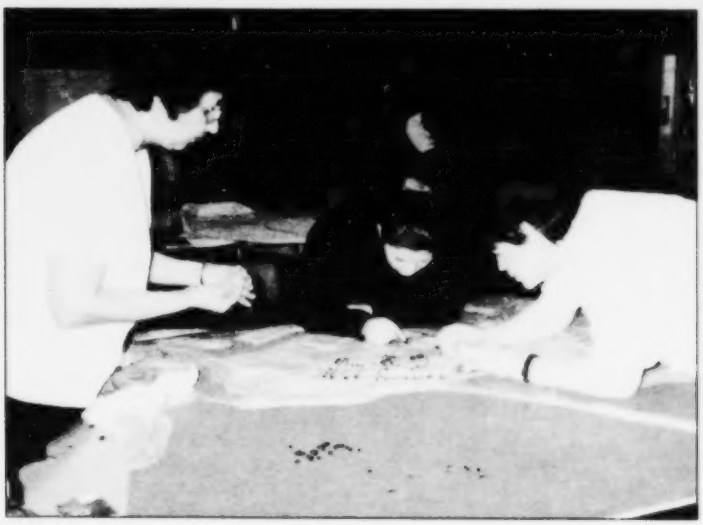
The Samson Cree Nation in central Alberta realized that settlement practices could not continue to rely on rural land for housing. They developed a community plan to create a town site that would reflect the culture and needs of its members.

In Atlantic Canada, a number of small rural First Nation communities have combined resources (Joint Community Planning Committee) to create a community planning process that benefits all. A seven-step model, tested in three First Nation pilot communities, was created.

The First Nation Community of Tsleil-Waututh in British Columbia, increasingly surrounded by urban development in Vancouver, developed a community plan aimed at protecting and enhancing their cultural traditions, while actively participating in complex regional governance and development arenas.

The key success factors are noted below.

Community	Key success factors
Rolling River First Nation	• Focus on economic development • Strong leadership • Skills development and capacity building
Samson Cree Nation	• Co-ordinated planning function • Defined planning process • Commitment and perseverance
Joint Community Planning Committee	• Collaboration of First Nation, federal and university resources and expertise • Development of planning model – a simple, well-defined process with real results • Community involvement • Capacity Building through shared trainee program
Tsleil-Waututh First Nation	• Open regional involvement • Effective partnering • Well-developed planning model



Working on the Pictou Landing First Nation physical model at Dalhousie University

First Nations Land Management Act Communities

The First Nations Land Management Act (FNLMA) allows First Nations to opt out of the Indian Act for land management purposes by entering into a Framework Agreement. First Nations adopting the FNLMA must develop their own land code.

In Ontario, the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation wanted to use their land for economic development, which has generated revenues that are now put toward social and other developments.

The Muskoday First Nation in Saskatchewan developed a land use plan to take timely advantage of business opportunities, which resulted in increased community confidence and other land use proposals.

In British Columbia, the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation wanted to control and manage their land and found that the responsibility led to improved technical capacity and partnerships.

The key success factors are noted below.

Community	Key success factors
Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, Ontario	• Cooperation among First Nations • Efficient planning processes • Best use of limited resources
Muskoday First Nation, Saskatchewan	• Trusted leadership • Innovative economic and land development • Skilled labour force
Lheidli T'enneh First Nation, B.C.	• Focusing available human resources • Involvement and commitment of family groups • Consistency of leadership and involved personnel • Partnerships with other First Nations and neighbouring municipalities

Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation Health and Resource Centre

Self-government Communities

For First Nations involved in self-government, the community planning function is influenced by the broader theme of self-determination. All of the First Nations profiled started the planning process by reflecting on their values and identity.

In the Yukon, the Teslin Tlingit First Nation's initiatives are guided by a 25-year strategic plan with a goal to reflect the Tlingit way in all systems of government. In Quebec, the Cree Nation of Mistissini's community plan looks at physical, social, economic and cultural development.

The Sioux Valley Dakota Nation in southwestern Manitoba signed a Self-government Agreement-in-Principle in 2001. In preparation for self-government, they recognized the need for a number of planning and management projects that include the development of a citizenship code, a comprehensive community plan, and land code.

The key success factors are noted below.

Community	Key success factors
Teslin Tlingit First Nation	• Culturally-based governance (clan system) • Perseverance for rights and breaking new ground • Strong multi-jurisdictional management
Cree Nation of Mistissini	• Highly focused community members – well organized • Energy, pride and a strong sense of ownership and responsibility • Well-developed community organizational structure (stable, capable and consistent)
Sioux Valley Dakota Nation	• Perseverance through 15 years of negotiations • Community support and involvement • Capacity building and skills development • Use of FNLMA as stepping stone to development of a land code

Satelite photo of Teslin Tlingit First Nation

Cree Nation of Mistissini Administration

CONCLUSION

Community planning positively contributes to the development of healthy and functional First Nation, Inuit and Northern communities. While the communities may have different priorities and circumstances, they share many common elements in their community planning approaches, some of which are highlighted below.

Engaging community members – Although community leaders, hired planning experts and/or technical support agencies may have a strong influence on the community planning process, the main source of vision and direction comes from community members.

Creating sustainable opportunity – The profiled communities place a high priority on having a skilled and diverse human resource pool and creating positive development opportunities for their members, and especially for their youth.

Planning processes lead to internal capacity development – When communities take on complex approaches to planning and development, human resources and internal capacities are often tested to the limit. Although taking on planning on many fronts can be slow and difficult, the processes, policies and capacities developed while addressing these initiatives strengthen the entire community.

Relationships are key – Relationship building improved the communities' planning and development capabilities, whether with other First Nations, with neighbouring municipalities, or with the private sector.

Accountability – Community planning can turn visions, expectations and goals into a structured course of action. Communities demonstrate to outside partners and financiers that their basis for community, economic and social development is sound and rational by using the planning tool. They show accountability through formal methods and processes such as joint planning committees, information sharing agreements and servicing agreements.

Leadership – Strong and consistent leadership is important for planning a successful community. The leadership shown in the profiled communities takes many forms that work with the needs and directions of the communities themselves.

The planning process is ongoing and evolutionary. Change is taking place as First Nations, Inuit and Northern communities work toward economic development and self-determination. At the same time, they are working to protect resources in ways that are economically and environmentally sustainable for future generations. Commitment to a community planning process is needed to make sure that growth and progress match the visions, aspirations and expectations of First Nations, Inuit and Northern communities.

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Housing Research at CMHC

Under Part IX of the *National Housing Act*, the Government of Canada provides funds to CMHC to conduct research into the social, economic and technical aspects of housing and related fields, and to undertake the publishing and distribution of the results of this research.

This fact sheet is one of a series intended to inform you of the nature and scope of CMHC's research.

Sharing the Story - *Comprehensive Community Planning - Experience in First Nations, Inuit and Northern Communities* is available on the Internet at:
www.cmhc.ca/en/imquaf/hehosu/sucopl/sucopl_010.cfm

Print copies can be obtained from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada by calling 1-800-567-9604
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